

722
DIALOGUES

BETWEEN A

REFORMER
K

AND AN

ANTI-REVOLUTIONIST.

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DIAGRAMS

MEMORANDUM



NOTES

1800

1800

THE

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION.

THE author of these sheets is no partizan. He is no hireling writer for either party. He was at the commencement of the French Revolution among the number of its admirers, but being at Paris in the beginning of the summer ninety-two, and observing the violence and absurdity with which the second National Assembly conducted the public affairs, his admiration abated, and he soon became convinced that monarchy was incompatible with an unbridled, ungovernable House of Representatives. The events which have since taken place, have excited and confirmed his abhorrence to a government, in which the people have too large a share. Alarmed at the doctrines which seem to spread in this kingdom, and at the means taken to make the people demand imaginary rights, he thinks it his duty, as far as his abilities will extend, to expose the fallacy of those, who, under

the pretence of enlightening the multitude, instil into their minds the principles of sedition and rebellion. How far he has succeeded, must be left to the judgment of those who will bestow upon it a candid perusal. If his arguments have weight enough to clog the career of imagination, and to make his readers reflect, his object is fully attained; since there is no danger of the people's going wrong, if they can be induced to reflect upon what is right. If, however, his labour should be unavailing, he will have to lament its failure, and can only console himself with the consciousness of his good intentions. He thinks it unnecessary to add his name to the work, since whatever weight there may be in his arguments, it will be neither increased nor diminished by the addition or omission of a syllable. He has not often obtruded himself upon the public notice, and never upon any occasion except where his own ideas of justice prompted him to tear off the veil from hypocrisy and deception.

London, Nov. 12th, 1794.

A DIA-

A

DIALOGUE, &c.

R. **H**AVE you heard the rejoicings of the mob?

A. For the acquittal of the prisoner tried for High Treason.

R. The same. I hope by this time you are convinced that the Reformers ask no more than is justly due to them.

A. The issue of this trial has not at all changed my opinion with respect to the merits of their demands. It was impossible for any man not in possession of all the evidence on both sides, to form any judgment with respect to the prisoner's guilt or innocence. But whether the Societies complained of, meant to subvert the government or not, is of no importance to the question that you and I have so often argued, namely, whether a Reform of Parliament would be injurious or beneficial to the people.

R. But the people are the proper judges of *that*, and their will ought to be the *law*.

A. Then you still persevere in your opinion, that the people are well qualified to govern themselves,

B

themselves, and that they have a right to assume the reins of government when they think proper.

R. I think the people have a right to do so, and Mr. Erskine, if we can credit the newspaper reports, said the same in his defence of Hardy. He quoted Locke, (an authority that no person has the boldness to call in question) and gave it as his own opinion, that if no *reformation* took place, a *revolution* would be the consequence.

A. Locke wrote to vindicate the conduct of that convention which conferred the crown upon king William and his wife. It was an answer to those who maintained that king James, even though he had violated his coronation oath, had not forfeited his title to the crown, which was his own by *divine*, and not by *human right*. But there is a wide difference in that case and the present, our king is not called upon to maintain that Constitution which he found at his accession to the throne, but to make a most formidable alteration in it.

R. The Reformers do not call upon the king to make the alteration, they address the Parliament.

A. But you know, that though they do not address the king in the first instance, it cannot be carried into effect without his concurrence; Locke's argument is this, *fides est servanda*, if a king does not stand to his bargain, the people need not stand to their bargain; he puts it upon the footing of a mutual contract, where the contracting parties are all bound alike. But the doctrine of *fides est servanda* makes against you and Mr. Erskine; our king has kept his faith, and if any alteration should ever take place against the
king's

king's approbation, it will be the people that violate the contract, and not the king.

R. But I understand Mr. Erskine's argument to extend thus far; that if the people think they can better their own situation by a change of government, they have a right to do it, and I think the same.

A. No man can entertain a higher opinion of the abilities and integrity of Mr. Erskine than I do, he is an ornament to his profession; but great as may be his regard to truth, I much doubt whether in the zeal of defending a client, he would scruple trespassing a little upon his cooler judgment. I was sorry to see such a speech attributed to Mr. Erskine, for it can scarcely fail of doing much mischief; people will pin their faith upon his judgment, as he seems to pin his upon Mr. Locke. I will, however, venture to affirm, that neither you, nor the ablest casuist that ever existed, can make out the people's right to enforce a reform, without setting aside that grand principle of society, *fides est servanda*, and substituting in its place, the *jus fortioris*. That the people have the *jus fortioris*, is as clear as that seven millions are stronger than one individual; but the *jus fortioris* is another name for power, it is the tyger's right over the lamb.

R. But cannot you conceive a *right* that the people may have independent of *power*? for example, it may happen that a despot may deprive the people of the power of governing themselves, but he cannot take away the *right*.

A. Let us try to settle the meaning of the word *right*, for in arguing this point, it is essential to determine the true signification of the term; at least, we should agree between ourselves upon a precise idea, and when we know what the word

right means, we may examine whether the people have the *right* or not.

R. I wonder you should raise a difficulty about the meaning of the word *right*. Does any one deny the Rights of Man?

A. My friend, give me leave to tell you, that the *rights of man* is a mere catch-word, calculated to mislead unthinking men.

R. How does it mislead?

A. I will explain if you will hear me with patience. The word *right* means a well-founded claim or title.

R. Granted. I agree to this definition.

A. Now whenever a person lays claim to a thing as his right, is it not incumbent upon him to shew some law, some acknowledged rule, or some ground upon which he rests and supports his claim?

R. Who disputes it?

A. Why then, if a body of men, or the advocate of their cause, claims certain privileges as their rights, is it not incumbent upon him to shew some law, rule, or ground, upon which he rests his claim?

R. It cannot be denied.

A. Then rules of right must be formed or fixed before it is possible to know what is a man's right; as for example, before you can know how many feet this room contains in length, you must have fixed upon some measure that shall bear the name of *one foot*.

R. But how do you apply this?

A. I apply it in this manner: suppose a Frenchman in the act of drawing up a code of the rights of man, as you know they have drawn up many, were to be interrogated upon every article; as for example, "Every man ought to be

"be represented, or to have a share in the government by representation." Suppose I ask him how is he certain that this is one of the rights of man---what answer do you think he would make to the question?

R. He would say, that it appeared so to him; that he thought it just and equitable.

A. But has he no previous rule; no fixed law by which he can demonstrate that this article is one of the Rights of Man?

R. No; he can have no rule nor guide but his own notions of justice and injustice.

A. Why, then, suppose you gave an hundred men orders to draw up a code of rights, do you think their productions would be the same in general?

R. They would certainly differ very materially, inasmuch as the understandings of the men would be very different both by nature and improvement.

A. Then if these hundred tables containing the rights of man were to be submitted to your choice and mine, do you think that we should fix upon one and the same table as the *true rights of man*?

R. No, I rather think that I should read them all carefully over, and select some articles from one table and some from another, and then form a table of my own.

A. I should do the same, and so would every man that had leisure and capacity to investigate the subject: in short, there would be as many codes as there were men. But what do you take to be the cause of these diversities?

R. I have already said, they are occasioned by the difference of intellect.

A. And

A. And by something else; and that is, the non-existence of *rights* until *laws* are made to create them.

R. What do you say? Is right then of human fabrication? Are there not natural rights, divine rights, and legal rights? The two former surely are not of human structure.

A. As to divine rights I leave them to the divines; they may settle them as soon as they can, and when they have all agreed upon a code I will examine them, and if I find they are supported by good authority, I will subscribe to them with pleasure; but we have nothing to do in this argument with divine rights; for the advocates of the *Rights of Man* do not rest their claim upon divine laws. They go back to nature, and endeavour to shew that man has certain rights conferred upon him by the laws of nature.

R. And do you deny the existence of *natural rights*?

A. I do; and I say, that there is a *fallacy* in the term, and it is this *fallacy* which I alluded to when I said some time back that the *Rights of Man* was a *catch-word* calculated to mislead unthinking men. The truth is, that *natural rights* and *natural liberties* mean one and the same thing, and whenever you make use of the term *natural rights*, you may as well say *natural liberties*, and I defy you, or the most skilful sophist, to distinguish between them.

R. I really do not understand you.

A. Then I must endeavour to express myself with more clearness. Suppose society to break up, that all human laws were dissolved; and that you wanted to establish your right to the bed upon which you lie; how would you set about proving your claim?

R. I

R. I should plead *priority of possession*.

A. Which plea your opponent would not acknowledge, since he might answer you thus---
You have had the use of it long enough, and it is now my turn to enjoy it. You had the liberty to take it when you found it, if you had the power, and now I have the same liberty. It would be in vain for them to talk about right, since each of them would be governed by a rule of his own making.

R. Then you maintain that there are no *rights* except what are founded upon human laws.

A. Even so, since the very word *right*, RECTUM, means that which is ordered, ordained, or commanded; and until something is ordered or commanded, there can be nothing *right* or *wrong*. If there were any thing that nature had ordered or ordained for my exclusive use, and I could discover what that is, I should have a right to it in the true sense of the word. The same holds good with respect to divine laws. If it can be proved that any thing is ordered to one man, or set of men, in preference to others, by the law of God, then undoubtedly that would become a *right*.

R. Has not GOD given *man* a right to the use of all inferior animals?

A. Upon examining that matter you will find that *power* and *right* are synonymous terms. A man has *power*, and consequently what he calls a *right*. I mean this: that if you are asked to prove your right to kill or *enslave* the brute creation, you could put it upon no other footing than that of *power*. God gave man the power over most animals, and man exercises it, and then calls it his *right*.

R. Well, for argument's sake, I will admit for the present (saying to myself the liberty of retraction)

traction) that there are no *rights* in the true sense of the word until they are created by human laws; and I will also consent to change the term, and say *natural liberties* instead of *natural rights*, what difference would there be in the catch-word?

A. A wonderful difference indeed---it would lose its effect entirely---it would then become an old exploded story. The cry of liberty has been so long stunning the public ear that the people do not mind it. The lovers of confusion were sensible that a new word was wanting to rouse the attention of the people, and therefore they coined one; but when you come to examine it thoroughly, you find the new and the old to have precisely the same meaning.

R. I do not see that.

A. Suppose a demagogue inveighing against despots and despotism, should tell his audience that kings had deprived their subjects of their natural liberties: you would say---Well, we knew *that* without your information. We are sensible that in a state of society we cannot enjoy the same liberties as we might do if we lived in a savage state: but if the same orator finding that his discourse made no impression upon his hearers should alter his term, and say, that despots have deprived us of our *natural rights*; the idea which would arise in the unexamining mind would be, that he was deprived of something which he ought to have enjoyed. Do you perceive the difference?

R. Methinks I do discover something, but not so clearly as I could wish. Have you not mistated the case? When the demagogue tells his audience that a despot has robbed his subjects of their *natural rights*, he means something different from

from their *natural liberties*. He means, that they are deprived of certain privileges which they might have and enjoy without any danger to the state, or to the peace of Society.

A. Why, that is but saying the same thing in other words, for it amounts to this; the despot does not leave you in the possession of so many of your natural liberties, as in your opinion he might do consistently with the safety of the commonweal. Turn and twist the sense how you will, it must always come back to this: that natural rights and natural liberties are precisely the same thing. But it is to the advantage of those who wish to disturb the public peace to consider them as distinct ideas. They endeavour to make people believe that nature has conferred on them certain unalienable *rights* which they ought not to be deprived of in a state of society. Then they tell you, that by nature all men are born with equal rights, and that is in some measure true, inasmuch as two nothings are always equal to each other. The fact is, that there is no *property* in a state of nature, and where there is no property there can be no *rights*.

R. But do you really think that the inventors of the new doctrine of the *rights of man* were possessed of so much art and cunning, as intentionally to disguise the old cause of tumult and insurrection under a new dress?

A. They possess more craft than you and I are able to detect, and they well knew that nothing would be so likely to operate upon the minds of men, particularly the weak and ignorant, as to make them believe that they were deprived of their *rights*. There is a natural abhorrence and indignation that springs up in the mind of every man when he thinks himself either duped by artifice

office or robbed by violence. Then there is another cause which contributes very much to promote the success of their machinations, and that is a certain portion of envy that inhabits the breast of every man in a greater or less degree. It happens, that you and I frequently see men of talents inferior to ourselves in the possession of high offices, great emolument, and extensive authority. When the mind is a little sickened by the invidious comparison of our own situation with that of our superiors, the doctrine of the *rights of man* comes with infinite force, and makes the deepest impression: it is like sowing weeds on a dung-hill. Again—the arguments they make use of are specious and very difficult to be answered: they say—We are by *nature* all equal, born with equal *rights*; why should one man lord it over another? No direct answer can be given to these assertions.

R. Why, then, if no answer can be given, their arguments must be sound and just.

A. I said, that no direct answer could be given: but still there is a way of showing the fallacy and the evil consequences of specious reasoning. Granted that men by nature have equal *rights*; that is, no rights at all, but liberties infinite: I say *infinite*, because I know of no restraint that the man of nature is under but the want of power; he may attempt every thing, and succeed where he can: but the man born and living in society, knowing the advantages of the social state by experience, and conceiving the miseries of the savage by what he has read, and by what he may, perhaps, have seen in a civil war, will, if he views the questions on both sides, reason something in this way—"I am living in
" a civilized state, under a government that has

“ many abuses ; but it has also many excellen-
 “ cies. The former I wish to correct, the latter
 “ I wish to preserve. Here are a number of men
 “ whose fortunes are desperate, who having a
 “ high opinion of their own talents, think them-
 “ selves capable of guiding and directing the
 “ public opinion, and that if by the aid of the
 “ people they can overturn the existing govern-
 “ ment, they may erect a new one upon the
 “ ruins of the old, and have in their own hands
 “ the principal share of administration, and emo-
 “ lument thereunto annexed ; now before I lend
 “ my individual assistance to any reformer, I
 “ ought to be assured of,

1st. That these Reformers mean well, and
 that they have an eye to the public happiness as
 well as to their own ambition.

2dly. Whether more mischiefs will not be
 produced by the attempt, than good by success,
 were it ever so certain.

3dly. Whether many of what are called
 abuses are not of service to the state ; and whe-
 ther the removal of small abuses might not open
 an inlet to others of a more pernicious tendency ?

4thly. What may be the fortune of myself
 and family in the struggle, even though the pro-
 ject should succeed. In short, every man before
 he engages himself, or persuades others to engage
 in a project for reform, ought, independently
 of his religious and moral obligations, to balance
 (as a merchant does his adventure) what may be
 his own individual profit or loss ; and it is upon
 this ground that I rest my foot, and promise to
 prove, beyond the power of refutation, that it is
 for the interest of nine hundred and ninety men
 out of a thousand to support the constitution and
 government of this kingdom : that dismissing for

the present the injunctions of religion, and leaving religious and moral consideration to the discussion of the clergy, I will shew, that even the meanest labourer in the street is in a better situation than he could reasonably expect to enjoy in a forced reformation.

R.- You promise a great deal, and I think you will be hard put to it to make good your engagement; but this will lead us into a very long discussion, for which, at present, I have not leisure, but I will see you again in the evening.

SECOND

SECOND DIALOGUE.

R. **W**ELL, you see, according to my promise, I am come to hear how you make it out that it will be to the advantage of every man to support the present government and constitution of his country. I am not ignorant of your opinion of mankind; you consider every man as ultimately actuated by his own interest: and I perceive your object is, in your conversation with the world, to lay hold of your hearers by the strongest handle, namely, that of their interest.

A. You are very right in your observation; you see that all those, whose hopes and expectations from a change of government are very sanguine, will, to the utmost of their power, promote it either openly or clandestinely; and that all those whose visible interest is to support the present system, will do so without any argument of mine. But there is a third description of men, I mean those who hold no places under government, who derive no other advantage, than what they share in common with all their fellow subjects, namely, that of security to person and property; and of this description I am as well as you, and by far the greatest part of the people. Now as the strength of party consists in numbers, more than in talents, it is very natural to suppose, that the friends of Reform will endeavour
your

your to interest this majority in their own favour, holding out to them a prospect of bettering their situations, if their schemes can be carried into effect. It is therefore of the utmost importance, that this disinterested majority, whose weight and influence can turn the scale either way, should well understand their present and future interest; and I have often wished, that some man of abilities sufficient to the task, and whose habits and situation of life, rendered him as impartial to the question as I myself am, would undertake to draw a fair balance of account, stating the good which we derive from our present form of government, and the evils which are inseparable from it; and then lay before us, the probable good and probable evil that would result from any change of system. This should be done in plain and intelligible language, so that every one that can read, should comprehend; I would have no oratorical flourishes, which are like flowers upon a tree that is dead at the root; but a fair picture of the good and bad on both sides.

R. But this which you wish to see done at large in a public pamphlet, is the very thing which you have promised to do in part.* But before you proceed any further, let me ask you, were you never one of the advocates for Reform?

A. Never a strenuous one, except for an abolition of tythes; and then, not without a just compensation to the Church. I always had my doubts of the propriety of a Reform of Parliament, I have in company argued the point on both sides, more for the sake of gaining information, than from conviction in my own mind of the propriety of the measure. Every one
knows

knows that the Reformers in this country cry out against the inequality of representation, and a very specious complaint they make of it. There have been times, when men of high rank in life have been the loudest in the clamour for reform; and we have seen the same men set their faces against it, whether from conviction of its dangerous tendency, or from what other cause, I do not pretend to determine; but those men who have no boroughs to dispose of, and have nothing to gain or lose immediately by a change in government, would do well to consider seriously, what would be the probable consequence of a reformation.

R. But in what you are going to say, it seems to me as if you would lose sight of justice altogether: *fiat justitia, ruat cælum.*

A. And in answer to your maxim, I give you another, *summum jus, summa est injuria.* The truth of my quotation is acknowledged in your own, and therefore there can be no doubt which bears the greatest authority; I lay this down as the corner stone of my argument, that in every thing that concerns politics, the good of the people ought to be the sole object.

R. To this I subscribe willingly.

A. And I expect to have your assent to the next proposition also, namely, that the advantages and disadvantages of our present state may be pretty accurately ascertained.

R. I should think so, by any persons who would take the trouble to investigate them.

A. And that all human projects, however well conceived, and however flattering they may appear, are liable to failures.

R. Surely,

R. Surely; the experience of this world justifies the observation. But why do you beat so much about the bush; why not come to the point at once?

A. Because I want to obtain your assent to some truths, which, however self-evident, you may by-and-by think fit to deny.

R. I thank you for the compliment.

A. And I lay it down as a maxim also, that every prudent man, before he embarks in any adventure that may endanger his present happiness, will make a just estimation of the risks to which it is exposed, and of the probable advantages he may derive from success.

R. He ought to consider the probabilities on both sides, and also extend his prospects to the possible chances.

A. Thus far we go on well together, and having fixed upon our data from which we are to reason, I say, that if the chances of deriving good from a Reform in Parliament, are fewer in number than the chances of mischief, it ought to be rejected.

R. But your argument, by precluding all innovation, would put a stop to improvement.

A. No; you have not well understood what I said. I say, that as in private life, every man who is about to change his situation or pursuit in life, ought to be guided by probabilities well examined; so for a still stronger reason, the public should examine the probabilities of meliorating their situation, before they consent to any change in government. The mistakes of individuals may be rectified; but the mistakes of kingdoms are fatal. Now in order to examine this question, whether a Reform in Parliament would

would be beneficial or not. I must call upon you to state the benefits which might probably be derived from it; in other words, what do you expect from it?

R. To enumerate all the immediate probable advantages, would be tedious indeed; and to state all the possible good consequences, is in its own nature absolutely impossible.

A. But you can tell me what are the expected advantages which weigh most upon your mind; you surely can tell me what it is that makes you wish for a Reform.

R. I will state a few of the principal ones:

1st. A Reform in Parliament, if every man had a vote in choosing the members, would be an act of justice to every individual.

2d. The Parliament would be independent of the Crown; or at all events, would be less biassed in their suffrages by interested motives.

3d. As a natural consequence of their exercising their reason, there would be fewer wars, and less taxes; this alone is an object of infinite importance if attainable.

4th. Peace would be beneficial to commerce; commerce would produce wealth; and wealth would necessarily spread and diffuse happiness throughout the world.

There are many other advantages, such as opening an inlet to men of talents to the first offices of government, which are now filled by men who are in possession of the greatest number of venal boroughs.

A. These you say are the principal advantages of Reform.

R. Yes; but not all: I wish to hear how you will consider these, before I offer any more.

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A. To

A. To examine them in the order in which you have placed them; I begin with that of equal justice to all, and I say, that object cannot be attained; for either you have an eye to number or property, in bestowing of votes. If to the former, the men of property will say, "What! shall Tom Ragman have as great a share as myself in the government; he who has no stake in it; whose interest is in exciting confusion, rather than in preserving peace and good order!" This objection has much weight, inasmuch as the end of all government is the security of person and property, one man has only his person to look to; but another has both person and property: and I expect you will admit, that both ought in justice to be represented. To adjust this, in such a manner as to satisfy the claims of both rich and poor, would be a Herculean labour indeed.

R. Why?

A. Because in the discussion of a question of this kind, you have no rules for your guide. It sets out upon an idea, that all former laws are done away; and that every class of people is to make the best bargain for themselves. No doubt, were such a question in public agitation, there would be many extravagant demands made on all sides, and it might excite an insurrection, as there would be no tribunal to which contending parties might appeal: there is no judging what might be the consequence of an ill-conducted attempt to equalize the representation and the power of election. What a field would be opened for declamation and invective! I look at the prospect, remote as I hope it is, with horror; but I will turn from it for the present, and suppose what is extremely improbable, that all parties were satisfied, or at least acquiesced in the
share

share allotted them, and that there was a Parliament assembled, all freely chosen, what would be the probable consequence? it must be one of these two, either the majority must be influenced at the expence of the national treasure, or they must remain in a state of independence. In the first case, things would return to where they now stand, but with this additional evil, that it would cost more money in the purchase, than it is supposed to do at the present time; so much the worse for the public. In the second case, that is, if the majority were not influenced by the crown, what would the consequence of that be? I own, it is difficult for any one not endued with the spirit of prophecy from above, to form even a rational conjecture; but I will tell you what I think would be among the various results: Man is by nature ambitious, selfish, and fond of power; that such is the human character, with a few exceptions only, I dare say you and every experienced man will allow. The influence of these passions would impel the leaders of Parliament to entrench upon the prerogative of the crown; the invasion might be resisted, and it would end either in an established republic, or there would remain nothing but the name of monarchy without the substance.

R. Might not the struggle end in favour of absolute monarchy?

A. To be sure it might, though in my opinion less likely. And I hardly can form a conjecture, which would be the greatest evil to the nation, a republic, or an absolute monarchy—both are to be dreaded; and it is for this reason that I wish to see all men who are not attached to party rally round the constitution, and to protect it from infringements from one side or the other.

I am not fond of comparisons in argument ; it is seldom that the similitude holds throughout : but I look upon our government as a ship that has her guns, stores, and provisions, pretty well stowed, that sails tolerably well ; but should the captain, in order to make her sail better, remove part of her cargo from the head to the stern, or from the stern to the head, she would sail much worse in fine weather, and in a storm might go to the bottom.

R. But your comparison does not hold good : Is the ship so well trimmed as to admit of no correction ?

A. I do not say that it is. I say this only, that it sails tolerably well, and that to make any important alteration in the stowing of her cargo might endanger her safety. But to drop the comparison, which has been pursued far enough, I must tell you this as a fact : you know that the Dissenters are of all men the most zealous for a Reform of Parliament ; in the course of argument I have asked many of them, Whether they expected in a reformed *Parliament* to find an *uninfluenced Parliament* ? and they have to a man answered in the affirmative. The next question that I always put was, Whether a monarchy be not incompatible with a Parliament so perfectly independent, as is not to be liable to influence or bias ? Most of them have declined answering the question ; and thence I conclude, that they are of my opinion.

R. But are you warranted in drawing that conclusion ?

A. I think so ; for when a person declines answering a plain question, it is rational to suppose, that the truth would make against him. But let me ask you, zealous as you are for a Reform in Parliament,

liament, would you vote for it, if you thought it would break or cripple the power of the Crown?

R. Most assuredly I would not; and I believe not one in a hundred that argue in its favour. At the same time I must say, that I do not see in a free Parliament the unavoidable ruin of the regal power.

A. In looking forward to events, we can argue from probabilities only,

“Heaven from all creatures hides the book of Fate,

“All but the page prescrib'd, our present state.”

All I can say is, from the natural ambition of man, encroachments may be expected; and candour must allow, that when men have the means of extending their own power, they seldom, if ever, want the will. To prove that an independent, or rather uninfluenced Parliament, would encroach upon the prerogatives of the Crown, I need only shew, that they would have the means.

R. But what distinction do you make between an independent and uninfluenced Parliament?

A. The difference is great; and it is an abuse of terms to say, that the Parliament is not at all times independent of the Crown, except with regard to the allegiance which they owe in common with all other subjects to their lawful Monarch. Every member may vote according to his conscience, if he chuses so to do; but there have been instances where some individuals have lost their places for not voting as the ministry wished them to vote; but those instances are not numerous.

R. You mean, that a pensioner or placeman giving a vote contrary to the wishes of the minister,

nister, is an instance of virtue very seldom to be met with.

A. That is not exactly my meaning. It is this: that the instances of ministerial vengeance for a disobliging vote in Parliament are not so frequent as the instances of disobliging votes. But this is straying from the question, and it is fit we should return. I think it requires very little argument to prove, that an uninfluenced Parliament would have the power of government in their own hands; and that, if they thought fit to exercise it, they would be supported by the majority of the people.

R. But would not the House of Lords be a sufficient check to any encroachment from the Commons?

A. I am afraid they would not. Look back to the days of Charles, and there is a full answer to your question.

R. But what are the evils you so much dread from an ungovernable House of Representatives?

A. There might be a great number of violent Dissenters returned by the people, and that would endanger the Church. And whether a church establishment be a good or a bad thing, every change of religious tenets, or alteration of its ceremonies, brings religion itself into disrepute: it cuts up more or less of the roots. Now it is not possible for any man who values peace or order, whether he be an implicit believer or not in revealed religion, to look forward to the consequences of destroying the established church, and impairing our belief in revealed religion, without dread and horror. But why do I talk about the Church? as if that were the principal thing that would be endangered by an ungovernable House of Commons? As it is not possible to
foresee

foresee what characters might get into Parliament, if universal suffrage were adopted; so it is impossible to form an idea of what measures they might pursue. Every body knows what infinite mischief, what acts of folly and madness, have been committed in France by men of no fortune, no character, nor property, being admitted into the National Convention. Who can insure us against the like being committed in this country?

R. But these acts of extravagance are almost inseparable from a revolution, and there is reason to believe, that when foreign powers cease to annoy them, the French will settle their government, and become a good and virtuous republic.

A. To what cause do you look up for this settlement? it cannot be to religion, for that is turned out of doors; it cannot be to a king, for they will not acknowledge his authority.

R. I expect it from reason, and improved intellect.

A. Well, taking it for granted, that time and much suffering may bring them back to reason, yet I contend, that of all forms of government a republic is the worst, and that to this kingdom in particular, it could scarcely fail of proving its utter ruin and destruction. But we will make this the subject of our next conversation.

THIRD

nister, is an instance of virtue very seldom to be met with.

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THIRD DIALOGUE.

R. BEING myself at leisure, and hoping to find you the same, I call upon you to hear your objections to a republican form of government.

A. I will state some of those I think the most weighty; but I must first put you in mind of one of the postulates to which you assented at our former meeting, namely, that a prudent man, before he embarks in any adventure that may endanger his present property, will make a just estimate of the risks to which it is exposed, and of the probable advantages he may derive from success. In pursuance of this maxim, when I consider the question of reform, the first thing that occurs to me, is the probability of its ending in a republic: and the second is, what would be the degree of public happiness should my opinion be verified, compared with that happiness we enjoy under the present form of government? I then turn my eyes round, and contemplate the advantages we now enjoy, and the evils under which we labour. Of these two a pretty just estimate may be formed, and I dare say, that in the discussion you and I should not differ very widely. But when we come to take a survey of the probable good and evil to be derived from a republic, we shall find it very difficult to determine upon any one point.

R. Why

R. Why! do you think me unreasonable?

A. No; but I expect to be told when I am stating the mischiefs to which all former republics have been exposed, that all things are changed; that no argument can be drawn from experience; and that the secret of governing by representation is a discovery made very lately, and utterly unknown to former times.

R. I shall undoubtedly say something of this nature. This is the age of reason. Men know how to govern themselves now, which their ancestors did not.

A. Here again we have a stumbling block thrown in our way. We have another catch-word, and that a flattering one. Man is by nature a proud animal: he delights in being told that his *rights* are manifold, and that his reason is enlightened. Think for a moment how pleasing it is to a boy to be told that he excels his father and grandfather in knowledge; but it is no less pleasing to the public of this day, to be told that they are wiser than the public of the last generation. Mark with what exultation a man exclaims—this is an enlightened age! it is the age of reason! it is the age of ratiocination! This I have often heard, and have almost as often asked the exclaimers to explain to my understanding any new light that has been communicated to this generation.

R. And what answer have you obtained? A very satisfactory one, no doubt.

A. Quite the reverse: I have never been able to discover one ray of light that shines upon this generation that did not shine upon the last.

R. That is the strangest assertion that ever I heard proceeding from your mouth. Have there

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not been many improvements made lately in the arts and sciences ?

A. Granted. But let me ask you, does the invention of a balloon, the discovery of another planet, the knowledge of electricity, throw any light upon the public mind ? I understand, that when a person calls this an enlightened age, he means that reason has a greater and more extensive sway, and that the people at large are informed of some great and important truths which were before unknown : I mean some religious or political truths, and also that their understandings are so improved as to be less liable to be imposed on by artful and ensnaring men. Is not this the sense in which you use the word *enlightened* ?

R. The sense in what every man uses it, I suppose.

A. Here, then, we join issue ; for I say, that the public are as great dupes to false reasoning now, as they were in any period of which we have their history ; all the difference which I can perceive is this—formerly men were the dupes of improbable tales ; they believed every thing which their teachers thought fit to tell them ; that is, they were led astray by false facts ; now they are made to believe that they have rights which nobody can define, and that they suffer wrongs which nobody ever felt. Formerly the people were led by pulpit oratory, now they are seduced by seditious publications. If there were no press, the clergy would have the keeping of the public conscience ; now that every man may publish his sentiments, the clergy have lost a great part of their influence, and the people are mostly in the hands of the proprietors of newspapers. This is a truth that every body must admit, and it is well known that large sums of money are expended

pended in this sort of traffic by all parties. If the public mind were really improved, it would be capable of distinguishing between truth and falsehood.

R. But surely you must admit that the multitude are less superstitious than they were formerly; that they are convinced of the falsehood of that doctrine which sets up the divine rights of kings; and that they are less liable to be cheated by religious frauds and imposture.

A. They have run from one extreme to the other---from believing that kings have a divine right over them, they pass to a belief that a governor is unnecessary; that they have a right to govern themselves, and that it is their interest to do so. They are both errors; but the latter is a thousand times more dangerous to society than the former. If the people were really enlightened, that is, if reason were their sole guide, they would be sensible of this mistake and correct it. They would see through the artifice of those men who maintain that the people have a right to govern themselves, and recommend the exercise of that right, under a hope that they themselves shall have the full guidance and direction of the public will. If a philosopher turn his eyes back to the history of mankind, he will find that the multitude have always been the dupes of artful men, and that every delusion has its day. If the present age had its true name, instead of being called the age of reason, it would be called the *age of discontent*.

R. You profess yourself an enemy to declamation, and yet you have done nothing but declaim since we have begun the conversation of this day.

A. To avoid that imputation, let us try to settle some facts upon which to reason, and the first fact to which I ask your assent is this : would the multitude feel themselves aggrieved by the partial representation in Parliament, if discontented men had not taken great pains to instil into them an idea that they were robbed or choused out of their rights ? but before you answer this question, I must remind you that you and I have always agreed, that whenever the heart did not accompany the voice, the argument should end ; for you and I are not the hired advocates of a cause, but disinterested men, mutually aiding each other in the discovery of truth.

R. Well. I admit that pains have been taken to awaken the public mind to a sense of public wrongs : but I ask in turn, do the wrongs exist ?

A. I answer you---*summum jus summa est injuria*. I admit that the people at large have not their just share of the powers of election ; but I say, that to give it to them would be like the gift of Pandora to Prometheus : nay, it would be worse ; for it would let all the evils of anarchy loose about their ears without leaving hope at the bottom : but there is one fact, or rather proposition, more, to which I want your assent, or refutation if wrong---I mean this ; If the enlighteners of the public understanding had really meant to enlighten, and not to dazzle, would they not state fairly to public view what might be the probable consequence of the people's exercising the right to govern themselves, supposing them possessed of that right or power, which is exactly the same thing ?

R. That seems rather to be the business of those who endeavour to maintain the opposite side of the question.

A. Then

A. Then you think that to enlighten the understanding it is necessary to state one side of the question only?

R. Not exactly so; but it seems to me that the judgment is assisted most when it is furnished with all the arguments that can be urged *pro* and *con*, and those perspicuously stated by the ablest writers of both sides; that, I believe has been already done.

A. But do you consider with what infinite advantage the advocates of reform address themselves to the passions of the people?

R. Yes; truth has always the advantage sooner or later.

A. It is certainly true, when they tell the people that they are not all equally represented; it is true also that if society were dissolved by consent, and to be formed anew, strict justice would require equality in all distributions of power and wealth, but expediency would not. This, then, is my complaint against the illuminators of the public. They begin with telling the people that they are by nature endowed with an infinite number of rights. The sound is pleasing---a man likes to be told of his having a multitude of rights. The next thing is, tyrants and despots have robbed you of these rights, and you have a right to recover them, and instead of being governed, to be all a set of governors yourselves. In these three propositions consist all that influx of light which has so dazzled the eyes of the present age. Now mark how they affect the passions. The first proposition excites joy; the second anger and indignation at the supposed insult; for a man does not like being robbed or outwitted; and the third proposition inspires hope and confidence in the recovery of something that

that they do not understand the use of. In fact, I cannot see any new light in this century that was not equally splendid in the last; and if it had its true name, it ought to be called, the *spirit of rebellion risen from the dead*: now mark with what vast disadvantage the opponent of this new doctrine of the Rights of Man enters the list against it. He cannot argue from the existing laws of his country, because he would be told that the majority of the people have the right, if they have the power, to new model them as often as they please: what must the opponent say to this? all he can urge in point is, that the principle of society and mutual intercourse between man and man is contained in this short sentence---*fides est servanda*---We must abide by our engagements---we were born under the constitution, and have hitherto lived under it. If an overpowerful majority chuse to break it to pieces, the minority must submit in suffering silence, and can only reproach their false brethren with a breach of faith. It would be useless to talk of right where there is no power upon earth to guarantee its possession. Of this nature was the dispute between the author of the Reflections on the French Revolution, and the author of the Rights of Man. The one denied the right of the people to alter the government, and proved by the laws of the land they were forbidden from attempting it: the latter did not deny the existence of the restraining law, but contended that a majority that had the power, might confer the right upon themselves. Men that argue about *rights* and do not first settle the rule or law by which they are to be determined, resemble a Christian and a Mahomedan disputing about the word of God: each makes out its case, and though they

they maintain doctrines diametrically opposite, they are both perfectly in the right: one produces a text of the Coran, and the other finds his in the Bible. Mr. Burke found his rule of right in the statute book, and Thomas Paine drew his authority from the magazine of rights in his own bosom.

R. But you have wandered away and quite lost sight of your promise. I understood that you were to state your objections to a republican form of government.

A. That I have strayed away is true; but it was your own fault. You set up the old cry of enlightened age, age of reason, and such idle absurdities as solid answers to my arguments drawn from experience. You were aware that there never was a republic in this world that approached a hundredth part so near to perfection as this government which you wish to reform; and knowing how hard the weight of examples must press upon you, you endeavour to get rid of the load by saying, that people are wiser now than they were formerly, and of course more capable of governing themselves: it was, therefore, incumbent upon me to show, that what you call light and knowledge is nothing more than the renovated spirit of discontent and rebellion.

R. Good God! It is impossible that you can think what you say! can you seriously assert that the lower order of people are not better informed than they were in the last century?

A. I admit that we find a far greater proportion of the inhabitants that can read and write now than in the last century, or even than could be found twenty years back. The art of reading and writing is progressive and extending; but when I consider what it is that the multitude

have learnt, the nature of the ideas which they have acquired, and the bias it has given to their understandings; I say that the light is dazzling and not true. They look at every object through the medium of envy. The fact is, a number of ambitious men who have no way of exalting themselves into power and consequence but by spreading discontent among the people, and throwing every thing into anarchy and confusion, have been at wonderful pains to expose all the apparent abuses of government in the most striking colours, to represent all government as tyranny, all existing laws as partial and unjust, and to maintain that all engagements that are not to our immediate advantage, may be violated at pleasure. The multitude would do well to look at the public characters of these men who busy themselves so much on the subject of reform. *Timeo danaos et dona ferentes* is an idea that the public should never let out of their minds when men of bad characters offer their service or advice.

R. But would you reject a good thing merely because it originated with men of doubtful integrity?

A. No. But it should be examined with more than ordinary attention, taking nothing upon trust, and always suspecting some guile or deception at the bottom; that a vast deal of deception is practised at this moment by the leaders of reform, is a fact of which no person can have a doubt. Why are they so anxious to make the people claim undefined rights, and to insist upon having their own wills for law, if they did not look forward to the prospect of having the guidance of the public mind? It is of the utmost importance to the demagogues to have the direction of the people; but it cannot be of use to the

the people to have them for their directors. But I will now state some of the principal objections which lie against a republic. Every body is acquainted with the history of Rome, and the perpetual struggles made for power during the time of its being a republic; that alone would be an unanswerable objection, were it not for that new argument, namely, that men are wiser now than they were formerly. but let us look into the history of the Italian States, which are more modern, and where the people maintain the same religion nearly as ourselves, that is, they were Christians: you will find that almost every state, whilst it continued a republic, was torn to pieces by factions, and intestine wars of ambitious men. In a republic where there is no supreme magistrate invested with power enough to preserve the peace against the strength of parties, men soon pass from words to blows. The same spirit that urges the porter to knock down the carman in the street, where there is no constable to prevent it, will urge the failing politician to recur to arms when he cannot succeed by argument: and that argument which you seem so willing to press upon me, namely, that men are wiser than formerly, and that every thing may be done by a virtuous education, tends the direct contrary way to what you intend it: for that doctrine which sets up natural rights and equality of men, is an encouragement to every attempt at power and authority; nay, it must make it personally dangerous to any individual to be in possession of power, since every one who can snatch it from the possessor has a right to do so, inasmuch as success by the new doctrine sanctifies the means. Do you not perceive that the light which the Reformers have spread in the world, has tended to disqualify men

for society, and that the competitor for power must be infinite, and the means which they will employ for its acquirement will be ten times more flagitious, if possible, than ever. If republics have been always thought bad governments in those times when the lower order of the people thought submission to their superiors a religious obligation or moral duty, what kind of a government must it be when all restraint is taken away, and every barrier thrown to the ground. 'Tis in vain to talk of reason. 'Tis rare, very rare, indeed, that men can be reasoned into obedience: they may be frightened by the terrors of futurity, or by the sight of the bayonet; but never can be talked out of their demands--and here I must beg your pardon for a moment's digression to take notice of an argument often urged by the dissenters, namely, that education will qualify men for living together in a republic: at the same time they promise not to work on his hopes and fears by the prospect of future rewards and punishment, but to convince his reason that it will be more advantageous to him in this world to do good than evil. With a man devoid of passions such arguments may have some weight, but with those who have ambitious souls, or who are urged by want, or any other powerful stimulus, they would have no power whatever. One passion may be stifled by another; but no man has ever yet been reasoned out of his passions by bare syllogisms.

R. I cannot deny the truth of your observation, that knowledge tends to make men dissatisfied, and consequently less easy of controul.

A. Too much knowledge was the snare by which the devil ousted Adam and Eve from Paradise, and one would be almost tempted to think that he was playing the same game to drive mankind

kind out of society; but there are many other evils attending a republican government, and those of vast magnitude. In a small country like this, having very powerful neighbours that may at any time become our enemies, it requires more than republican vigour to protect us from foreign conquest; for I expect you will allow that a republic of equal size is not so strong and vigorous against a foreign enemy as a monarchy: their councils are more divided; and their operations are more slow. Again: there is more danger of treason in a republic than in a monarchy; for a rich enemy may buy the interest of a leading republican, but cannot purchase the defection of a king. A large bribe may be superior to a leading republican's expectation from the munificence of his own country; but a king could only be purchased by the offer of a kingdom more worth than that which his enemies wanted to take from him. Another evil is, that penal laws, however hard they might bear upon an individual, could admit of no mitigation; mercy must be banished from the realm: then with respect to foreign wars, the paucity of which makes one of your advantages to be expected from reform, I must take you back to history and example. The republics of Greece and Rome waged eternal war, and wars of the most destructive kind. It is seldom that you hear of kings waging war with so much hatred as to destroy all the innocent inhabitants of the towns they conquer. Republics have done so frequently.

R. But those were times of barbarism: men were not so well educated in the principles of morality as they are now: they were less civilized: every thing is altered. You cannot argue from what was formerly to what will be in future.

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A. Why that is coming back to your old exploded argument. It is saying that the same causes will not produce the same effects: but let us go to recent examples: let us turn our eyes to our neighbours. What despot has ever waged war with more savage cruelty than the fathers of the Rights of Man? Do their actions correspond in the smallest article with their declarations? They disclaimed conquest, and they conquer every town and village they approach, and plunder and enslave the inhabitants without mercy and beyond example.

R. But they have had stronger provocation than usual: they have been ill-treated by crowned heads.

A. And to revenge themselves of their oppressors, who are out of their reach, they slay, rob, and murder the oppressed. One would think, that if they believed their own declarations, that the subjects of all kings are a miserably oppressed race of beings, they would endeavour to alleviate and soothe the miseries of the oppressed people as soon as they fell into their own power; but instead of alleviation, what do the people experience but the most shocking barbarity. I must say that it is a curious way of arguing that you adopt. You want to prove that under a republican government there would be fewer wars, and that they would be waged with less cruelty than under a monarchy; but finding that neither former nor present experience will bear you out in your conclusion, you get rid of both by saying, we must not pay attention to former events because men are grown wiser; neither must we pay attention to what is now passing, because the men are angry, they are in a passion: but I will agree with you for argument's sake, to lay out
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of the question both ancient and modern example ; and I will tell you why a republic is more cruel in its wars than kings, particularly Christian kings ; and the reasons I shall adduce are such as ever have operated and ever will operate. In republican debates men's passions are roused by the inflammatory speeches of each other. In a great assembly there will always be found eloquent and vindictive men. The blame and disgrace of a bad action is divided : many a man who would not go a great length in acts of injustice by himself alone, will not hesitate to accompany a great number : he thinks he may derive benefit to himself from the mischief, without having any share in the responsibility. It is upon the same principle that a child fears to go alone in the dark, but will travel cheerfully enough if he has plenty of companions round him. Now as in popular assemblies, it is the bold and violent man that takes the lead, so is there a much greater chance of finding some violent, outrageous character in an assembly of 5 or 600 men than in the individual person of one king. Bad kings occur very often, but bad leaders of popular assemblies occur always, almost without exception. This is one very strong reason why I dislike a republic ; and what I have said is, I believe, a full answer to your assertion, that wars would be less frequent, and consequently the blessings of peace more abundant and less interrupted. I could mention many more evils that would result from a republican form of government, but these already stated are sufficient to shew, that none of these advantages which you so eagerly and confidently expect have the smallest chance of being realized. As we are both very much fatigued with this argument at present, we will, if you please,

please, let it rest as it now stands, and when we meet again, we will consider what are the principal advantages of our present form of government, and what are those abuses that call loudly for redress, and what would be the probable consequences of redressing them.

FOURTH DIALOGUE,

R. **AS** we are now at leisure and alone, I should be glad to hear you state the vast advantages of our constitution as it now stands; for I must own, that when I read in the papers, or hear professed orators make use of the terms *most excellent, most glorious, and such like epithets*, it makes no impression whatever upon my mind; and in general epithets used in the superlative degree defeat the speaker's purpose.

A. That our constitution is the best that ever yet was reduced to practice is so clear a truth as to require no proof. I believe there is not one among the Reformers that harbours, or even advances, a contrary opinion. The two principal objects for which men enter into society, and submit to laws, are attained in their fullest extent in this country. I mean protection to person, and security to property. There is nothing but person and property upon which violence can be used, or injustice operate.

R. You mean security to property against the attempts of individuals; but where is the difference to me, whether I am robbed by a highwayman upon the road, an overbearing nobleman in my parish, or by the officers of government; if my family are reduced to beggary, the evil is the same,

same, whether it originate from one of these causes or the other.

A. By this I am to understand, that you admit the first part of my position, namely, the security of person.

R. I shall not dispute that point; for were I to do it, you would tell me immediately that the late acquittal was the highest proof of it. I grant that the person is secure, especially when the Habeas Corpus Act is in force; but let me hear you answer me respecting property.

A. Before I enter upon that discussion, I must beg you to state the grievances more distinctly.

R. The taxes are so numerous and so heavy, that it is scarcely possible for the greatest industry to bear up against the load of oppression.

A. That the taxes are as you say I cannot deny; and that they bear much harder upon some classes of people than upon others, is a truth that cannot be disputed. However you are not ignorant that many great financiers are of opinion, that the taxes themselves create the power of discharging them: to enter upon this subject at large would lead us into a labyrinth of argument: but we will, if you please, put the question upon a single point---Do the people in general, including all classes, from the king down to the cobbler, live better or worse than they did fifty years ago?

R. I think luxury has made great strides; but to answer your question generally is very difficult; no man could do it but one of a very advanced age, who had minutely examined the ways and manners of living, in all classes, when he was a boy, and he must do the same over again now, I do not see how your question can be answered.

A. But you must be sensible that upon the solution of this question depends the merit or demerit

rit of increased taxation, and I will put the question in another form : is it not a general observation throughout the kingdom, That the wives and daughters of farmers, tradesmen, artificers, and all the labouring and industrious men, dress much better than they used to do ? Is not this almost an universal remark ?

R. Yes, I have heard it often ; but what do you infer from this admission ? It only proves the increase of pride.

A. But what is it that increases pride ? Nothing that I know of but riches. Poverty is always humble. If the lower order of people are prouder now than they used to be, it is evident that they are easier in their circumstances.

R. But there are many thousands that are miserably poor indeed.

A. And such there are in all countries, and ever must be as long as the necessities of man exist : but if you were to appoint a committee of examiners in every parish, whose duty it should be to inquire into the causes of extreme poverty in those families where they found it, you would find that in nine instances out of ten their distress was partly owing to their own vice or folly.

R. But upon what ground do you make this assertion ?

A. Upon my own observation in those parishes where I have lived. Instances occur of sickness and accidental evils which reduce the labouring poor to extreme distress ; but there is a parish bound to relieve them, and that relief to be apportioned, not by those who are to provide it, but by a magistrate : but as we are upon the subject of taxation, I will give you my sentiments upon it in as few words as I can. Increase of taxes excites industry, because it increases the

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number of wealthy individuals. It opens a market for all the *need-nots* of life (if you will excuse the term) such as lace, silks, fattins, embroidery, fine furniture, in a word, every thing that is more for ornament than use. Let me ask you if there were not a number of rich idlers to take off these useless commodities at a high price, how would you employ all the superfluous hands? For when agriculture, and the indispensable occupations of life are supplied with as many hands as they can employ, all the overflow may as well be engaged in one thing as another, provided it be innocent. Increase of taxes creates a kind of artificial ideal property, and tends to increase the nominal value of real property.

R. I understand you. You mean to say that there must always be a changeable balance between real property and ideal; that though gold and its substitute paper may be increased *ad infinitum*, which are what you mean by ideal property, yet real or substantial property, such as land and its product, cannot be increased but by slow degrees.

A. You have taken the words out of my mouth. It is not, in fact, that land or its produce is worth more now than 100 years ago; but that the common medium in which we express the value of things is worth less, because it is more plentiful; but the true way to estimate things is by comparison of one thing with another. If bread and all other articles of necessity are increased one-fifth in their price, and labour is increased in the same ratio, the poor man is just as well situated now as he was formerly. That the price of labour has kept pace with the price of goods is, I believe, generally true throughout most of the counties in Great Britain: at the same

same time there may be exceptions, and whenever they exist, so far increased taxation is an evil of great magnitude. Taxes seem to bear hardest upon individuals of small fortune who retire to live upon their income, since not being in any business, they cannot counterpoise the pressure by taxing others in their turn. People who complain of taxes are like those who are hunting after a perpetual motion: in the latter case they want a weight to be heavier than itself, and in the former they want all the advantages of quick consumption and rapid sale, without contributing any part of their gains towards creating consumers. They would have no overgrown wealthy men to buy their useless ware, and yet they would have a market for them; but allowing the national debt to be a great evil, of which, however, I have strong doubts, yet the present minister has adopted a plan which in a few years must reduce it, provided we have a peace for any length of time.

R. That, I believe, is considered by many people as one among many delusions.

A. It is no delusion, and the influence of the sinking fund has been felt prodigiously for the last three or four years preceding the war, and will be felt again in a much greater degree when a peace takes place.

R. For what reason?

A. Because government's stock-broker will buy up near two millions of the three per cents. every year, which stock will not be thrown upon the market again. The million appropriated to pay off a part of the national debt in the year 1786, and the interest of about twelve millions already bought in, and various other sums which have been thrown into the mass for reducing the debt,

will, particularly whilst the funds are low, have a most rapid progress in reducing the national debt. Few persons understand thoroughly the nature of an annuity at compound interest, because the calculations, if they are long, require the use of logarithms and algebra; but to give you some idea of the favourable prospect we have of diminishing the debt, I must observe, that the million a year has in about seven years bought in eleven millions of stock: now government's broker has not less than one and a half million a year for that purpose, and, therefore, in seven years more he may, perhaps, buy fifteen or sixteen millions more: then at the end of the next seven years he would have more than two millions to employ in the purchase of stock, which in the next seven years would purchase twenty millions more. I state this without reference to accounts; but you would find, were you to investigate the subject, that in the space of half a century the national debt would be so reduced as to require a repeal of the law. Possibly half a century might be too little to produce the effect I foresee; but as government collects nine or ten millions to pay the interest of former loans, as long as the interest is paid to individuals who spend it, it goes on well enough; the circulation is kept up; but when the taxes remain, and the amount of them, instead of being spent in luxuries, is laid out in the purchase of stock in the name of certain commissioners who never spend a shilling of it, it will in time turn out that the taxes cannot be collected. That day, however, is remote, and the evil may be remedied when it is felt. I have touched upon this only to shew, that taxes, heavy as they seem, carry their own alleviation along with them; and that there is a prospect, nay, a well-

well-grounded expectation, that they may in a short time be reduced. Had every former minister studied the good of futurity as much as the present one has done, in that plan of borrowing upon every loan as much more than is wanted as will serve to raise a fund for the discharge of the debt in a reasonable time, this kingdom would not have had reason to complain of the weight of taxes as it now does. At the same time that I say this, I am by no means sure that the national debt, or the consequent taxes, are an evil; but having now said all that I think necessary on this subject, I want to know what are the other evils which you find in this government.

R. I should like to see an abolition of tythes.

A. And so should I, if it can be done without injuring the church; and, indeed, I am of opinion, that it would not be difficult to form a plan for the abolition of tythes, so as to give the clergy a full compensation, to raise the value of lands to the lord of the soil, to satisfy the poor tenant who tills the ground, and to benefit the public by an increased cultivation and more abundant produce. Such a plan I once saw in the hands of a gentleman, who said, that he would submit it to the public, were it not that he understood the then Chancellor would set his face against it.

R. Then I suppose he preserves it for better days.

A. Certainly; now is not the time for any innovation.---But what other grievances have you that call for redress?

R. The law requires much reform. The expenses of recovering one's just right is more than the object is worth: it is a denial of justice when the expense of suit disables a man from prosecuting his claim.

A. I can-

A. I cannot deny the truth of your complaint ; but when we look for the origin of the evil, we shall trace it to several sources. One is the stamps, and for that government is answerable : another is freedom itself---to prevent judges from using an arbitrary discretion in every case as it may arise, they are tied down to forms : thence proceed subtleties, nice distinctions, and intricacies that puzzle and perplex the simplest causes : another source is, the knavery of the professors, to prevent which is the province of the judges ; it is, however, a duty that is not fulfilled so often as might be wished ; perhaps they may have a feeling for the line in which they were bred, and from which they are raised by merit or interest ; and they may also feel a gratitude towards a speculating attorney for the fees they formerly received in their profession as advocates. Much blame is also due to the parties themselves who employ more counsellors than are necessary, and see them higher than they merit. An attorney, when he sits down to make out his bill upon a losing suitor, racks his invention to find out items or pretexts for charging. I have seen a charge for answering an anonymous letter, which the attorney argued must have been written by somebody, possibly by his own clerk ; but this is an evil that might be remedied without a Reform in Parliament. If Providence, in mercy to mankind, should ever inspire a rich conscientious lawyer in Parliament with the desire of transmitting his name with honour to posterity, he might take it into his head to bring in a bill to remedy these evils : none but a lawyer is capable of the task ; but should it ever be undertaken, he would have abundant support from members of all descriptions.—But what is your next grievance ?

R. The impress service.

A. That is an evil, no doubt, but not a general one; it attaches only to seamen. Many plans have been proposed for remedying the defect, but none have been adequate to the purpose: but great as this evil is to the suffering individuals, the public reap the benefit. It were, however, much to be wished that some plan of conscription could be fixed on, wherein seamen might enter their names in time of peace, and receive some gratuity by way of retaining fee, thereby giving their country a legal right to insist on having their services in times of danger or public necessity. I mention this but as a loose, undigested idea, to which, perhaps, many objections might be raised; but there is none that strikes me at present except the additional expense; this at all events is an evil that might be remedied without a Reform in Parliament, since I am convinced that there are not many members in either House that would not concur in a well-founded plan for manning the navy without the impress.—But what is your next grievance?

R. The Test Act.

A. I wonder that had not been at the head of the column, or, perhaps, you keep your strongest objections to the last. The repeal of the Test Act is a matter of great importance. It has been the subject of contention for near a century. Many books have been written; many speeches have been made for and against it. I cannot say that I have ever made myself master of the subject; but from what little I have heard and read, I have made a few general reflections, the substance of which is, that as religion, though not the offspring, is the foster child of hope and fear, so as long as these two passions make part of the mental constitution

stitution of man, it cannot be otherwise but some sort or other of religion must exist : now religion is found to have a greater or less effect upon the conduct of men from various circumstances. Instances occur of bigotry and religious frenzy, and instances occur also of almost total disregard : but the generality of mankind make religion a matter of very serious consideration, and there is a certain natural sympathy and antipathy in the human mind towards those whose religious sentiments coincide or disagree with our own. Are these propositions true ?

R. I shall not dispute them till I see what use you make of them.

A. The use I shall make of them is this : that as in the conduct of all human affairs, unanimity, or the want of unanimity in councils, and in execution, is the principal cause of failure or success, so it is essential to the interest of the state that all the Privy Council, Cabinet Council, both Houses of Parliament, in short, every class of men entrusted with the management of great and important affairs, should be of one religion. This appears to me to be the most solid objection against the repeal of the Test Act.

R. Then you lay the truth of the doctrines on the side of dissenters, and the errors on the side of the church, quite out of the question.

A. I profess myself incapable of judging on which side truth lies : opinion always concerns itself about things that cannot be known, and generally about things that are quite indifferent whether known or not.

R. Did you never read the thirty-nine articles ?

A. I cast my eye over them once, but I did not clearly comprehend their meaning : they seem to

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go to points of faith rather too abstruse for common minds.

R. But is it reasonable that the disbelief of abstruse points should be a bar to any man's advancement in life ?

A. With respect to matters of faith, this is my opinion ; that all those who read diligently, and study and examine the several articles, will believe no more than brings conviction to their understanding ; and as understandings vary, so will faith : but as to the bulk of mankind who think it their duty to profess a belief in all they are ordered or taught to believe, and who never examine or think upon the subject, it matters very little to them whether there are thirty-nine articles, or 300 times that number.

R. But this is no answer to my question.

A. All I can say is, that were a new set of articles, or a new test to be made, possibly the clergy of the present day might make it less difficult to the consciences of some men than it is at present.

R. Then if I understand your meaning, you think that there ought to be a test for the sake of preserving unanimity in councils, but that the test should be altered.

A. No ; the very contrary is my meaning : I think matters of faith should not be disturbed, since the first idea that springs in my mind when the clergy or church alters the articles of faith is, that what was true last century, must be true in this century, and that if man can make the same thing true or false, the whole system must be of human contrivance. When Luther and Calvin shook popery, they shook the whole fabric of the Christian religion a little : an ordinary man would say---If I have been wandering fifty years in an

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error, what security have I that I am now in the right path? I had human conductors before, and I have human conductors now.

R. Then you are against altering the test or repealing it.

A. For the reasons I have assigned. No man has a higher veneration for the dissenters, many of them are learned, liberal, and humane, taken as a body of men, than I have: they exercise their talents of ratiocination more than we of the church generally do, and in argument they have consequently a greater advantage from their superior skill in logic; at the same time I do not wish to see men of their principles take the lead in the public affairs of this kingdom.

R. But are they not justified in their attempt to bring about a repeal?

A. They must not seek for a justification in their own doctrines, but they may find it in some of Mr. Burke's writings; I think it is that gentleman (I beg his pardon if I mistake) who doubts the right of the majority to bind the minority. No; if the dissenters would abide by their own rule of right, namely, that the general opinion of the people ought to be followed, and their will to be obeyed, then the test act would not be repealed or altered, and they would give up the attempt till a change shall take place in the public sentiment: but no man follows his own rules of right and justice farther than they suit him; thence arises the necessity of positive law to fix rules and settle claims and pretensions.---But what is the next grievance that you wish to have redressed?

R. Places, pensions, useless offices, and every kind of unnecessary drain to the public treasure.

A. And

A. And among these drains, as you are a convert of Dr. Priestley, I suppose you include the church establishment.

R. Perhaps I do think that it might be curtailed, or reformed.

A. By reformed, do you mean done away?

R. You may take it as you please.

A. I thought the repeal of the Test Act a question of vast magnitude; but the idea of doing away the church establishment, and letting loose upon the public an infinity of preachers of every kind and description without any fixed form of worship or place of religious instruction to which people might resort, and which might serve as a mound against an inundation of madness and folly, presents to the imagination such a picture of confusion and horror that I scarce know how to contemplate its consequences; and yet this is one of the probable effects to be expected from a Reform of Parliament if carried to the length of universal suffrage; for if, as I said before, all descriptions of men were admissible in the House of Commons, it is impossible to say what parts of the present constitution they would throw down, or what they would build up upon its ruins; it appears to me like breaking up society and beginning the world anew: but to come more closely to the point--First, with regard to places and pensions: You cannot have a monarchy without a number of high offices about it, and every king must have it in his power to reward merit and past services. I do not know what may be the amount of the expense incurred by all the pensions and unnecessary places; but as the sums of money disposed of or lavished in that way are expended again in the purchase of the luxuries and superfluities of life, the benefit whereof is felt by

tradesmen and artists, it does not appear to me to be an evil of such enormous magnitude as to call very loudly for redress. Suppose that the same sums of money that are now paid away for pensions and idle places, sinecures, and such like, were paid as the interest of fifteen or sixteen millions of money more than is at present owing, where would the difference be?

R. Perhaps none at all; since whether 2000 a year be paid to his grace as the interest of his money in the funds, or as the reward of his services, it is the same thing to the public, they must pay it; and as it is brought into circulation again, they are as much enabled to pay pensions by the increased circulation as they are to pay taxes by the same means. The only point of doubt with me is, whether the evil of laying on a tax, or the granting a pension payable by the people, is remedied by the consequent spending of the money among those who are to pay it.

A. I can give you no better proof than experience. One hundred years ago it would have been difficult to raise five millions by taxes in one year, and now we can raise seventeen or eighteen millions.

R. But is not this to be accounted for by the increase of trade and commerce?

A. True: but what is it that gives life to trade and commerce? A quick consumption of the luxuries of life. In vain would the girls in the west of England make lace if there were not other women in circumstances sufficiently affluent to purchase it. In vain would the potters in Staffordshire make their mock china, if there were no rich families that could afford to break two or three sets a year. Let me for a proof of this put a few questions to yourself.

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You have 2000*l.* a year issuing from the 3 per cents; I saw you receive half that sum at the last dividend. How did you dispose of that money?

R. I paid all my tradesmen's bills; the coach-maker had 25*l.* for repairs, and new-painting my chariot; between 40 and 50*l.* went for some of Wedgewood's ware; my taylor had 30*l.*; and various other tradesmen had their shares. A very large sum went to pay for lace and millinery for my wife and daughters; in a word, the greatest part of the thousand was paid away for articles of luxury.

A. Then, except your butcher's bill, your baker's, your grocer's, and two or three others, your half-year's income went for the luxuries and superfluities of life!

R. It is too true; it is astonishing to what a pitch luxury is carried by folly.

A. But after all, what is luxury but human industry: fine buildings, fine cloaths, fine coaches, fine every thing is the effect of human labour. And when you take a full view of the subject, it seems to amount to this: man is of an active disposition, he must be employed, a certain quantity of labour is required for raising the necessaries of life; and after those are provided for in the fullest extent, every species of labour, direct it how you will, must be for the purposes of luxury, pleasure, and amusement. The effect of the national debt has been to create a number of rich men, who, being able to spend a great deal of money, have given encouragement to, and whetted the industry of the poor; the latter, have invented articles of luxury, to tempt the money out of the rich men's pockets; they have succeeded, bought stock, received their dividends, and became rich men in their turn. Luxury is
injurious

injurious to some families, that have not prudence enough to restrain their expenses within their incomes; but it is the very soul of trade and commerce. The same arguments which apply to the public debt, to places and pensions, apply with equal force to the royal establishment, and to the branches of the royal family; though they are in the receipt of large incomes, it furnishes them with nothing more than the choice of luxuries and amusements, whereon to spend their money. Of the real necessities of life, they have no more than other people, and all the pre-eminence they enjoy, consists in pomp, parade, and external show. The splendour of a court is in itself extremely insignificant, but it is necessary to impress the people with a high idea of royal dignity; if instead of laying the money out upon the purchase of fine dresses, fine coaches, fine bows, fine curties, and such sort of ware, as would find a market no where else, the royal family were to send the specie out of the kingdom, it would be a very serious injury to the nation; but as it is circulated again among all the subjects, it is evident that the royal establishment is not such a burthen to the people, as those who wish to put the world out of conceit with monarchy, endeavour to make us believe. But I shall now drop the subject of places and pensions, the mischief of which consists more in the jealousy and envy which they create, than in the additional burthens they impose upon the people; besides, I know that it is the church that you strike at, under the term of unnecessary drain of public wealth. The history of all churches, whether Christian, Mahomedan, Jew, Pagan, or others, presents a most unpleasing picture; this, I am free to admit, and perhaps in
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fair argument it would go farther to prove, that they had nothing of divinity in them, than all the books that ever were written on the subject. It would not be unfair reasoning to say, that if there were any religion more pleasing to the Almighty than another, he would not permit that religion to be debased and dishonoured by those whom he appointed to preach it. At the same time we must grant also, that if there ever was a system of morality that bore the appearance of divine authenticity, it is that delivered in the four gospels; I lay the epistles out of the question, for they run into questions of theology, and have contributed to lay the foundation of all theological subtleties and disputes that have bewildered and disgraced the human understanding. But as the doctrine delivered by the Evangelists, is that which our clergy are commanded to preach to their congregations, so, if they obey their orders, they can preach up nothing but what is very good, and extremely necessary to be inculcated into the minds of the common people. Again, as it is most essential to the good of society, that the people should be well instructed in morality, so it is necessary that the utmost care should be taken to prevent any doctrine being propagated that may tend to debauch the morals of the people: thence arises the necessity of subordination in the church, that the parson should in some measure be answerable for his flock, the bishop for the parsons in his diocese, and the king, who is at the head of the church, for the appointment of the bishops.

R. But in all your arguments, you seem to lay the Scriptures out of the question; you never say a word about the appointment of bishops by the apostles:

apostles; nor whether orthodoxy requires such officers in the church; or not.

A. In the beginning of our conversations, you well remember, that I told you of my intention to shew what was the interest of almost every individual in this kingdom; namely, to support the Constitution as it now stands; I never promised to investigate the *quid verum, quid falsum*, but only the *quid utile, quid non*.

R. But do you not acknowledge the existence of many abuses in the established church?

A. Doubtless there are; many of which might be corrected, without the least danger to the constitution; as for example, plurality of livings, which it would be better, were it never dispensed with. The tythes, as I said before, might be commuted with perfect safety, and with general, if not universal satisfaction.

R. But would not the doing away of bishops be a vast saving to the nation?

A. Not a penny.

R. You deal in paradoxes.

A. Where is the difference to you and me, whether the revenues annexed to a bishopric, belong to an ecclesiastic or a layman? The churchmen make a part of the community at large, and whether the property which they enjoy, be held by them as their salaries and emolument, or were held by others as rents of their freehold estates, can make no difference to the public. I will put the case another way, and you may perhaps understand me better. Our parson, you know, has an income of 250*l.* a year in tythes; he collects it from several estates in the parish, whose total amount, according to the poor rates, is something less than 1700*l.* a year. Suppose that tythes were abolished by act of parliament, what would be

be the consequence? why, every landholder in our parish of 100*l.* a year, would raise his rent upon the tenant 15*l.* and all other landlords would raise theirs in the same proportion; these landlords would be great gainers, but the public would gain nothing, since it is indifferent to them whether the 1950*l.* a year, (the rent and tythes added together) be divided between 15 or 16 members of society.

R. Why then it seems that tythes are only a bad thing, as far as they tend to create animosities and lawsuits, and to impede the progress of cultivation.

A. Even so; and when you talk about a saving to the nation, it is evident that you are in a mistake; since the transferring of property from one subject to another, makes no actual increase or diminution to the riches of the nation. Perhaps it is better for the public to have a considerable share of the lands and revenues of the kingdom, held by a wandering life-tenure, than to have it all fixed in families by hereditary succession. It serves as a resource for those whose circumstances require their children to be bred to the church. To pursue this argument any farther at present, would be of no service to you or me, but upon the general view, I think the abolition of the church establishment would be of no advantage to the nation in point of oeconomy, and ruinous in point of morality.

R. But might not the revenues of the church be applied to the payment of the national debt, and benefit the public by easing them of taxes?

A. With as much justice as they could withhold the interest of your money in the funds. Great part of the tythes are lay property, and the presentations to livings are in the hands of lay-

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men, at least a great part of them, and are as sacred property as your or my estate; when you once break through the sacredness of private property, every thing is over. I cannot discover any advantage that the public could derive from a downfall of the church; on the contrary, I can figure to myself a vast deal of mischief which it might occasion.

R. What are these mischiefs which you apprehend?

A. First, the influx of nonsensical preachers, and the consequent ruin of morality.

R. But as toleration prevails in this kingdom, preachers may now be multiplied *ad infinitum*.

A. There are already too many, and perhaps the present discontent is owing to their discourses. Nothing is easier, than for a popular speaker to raise the passions of mankind by drawing frightful pictures; the best of institutions may be rendered odious by partial representations, without even having one falshood in the composition; for example, it is easy to calculate the vast expense of church establishment, and the first idea that strikes is, that the public would be so much the gainer by the abolition of the establishment; but the fact is, that the advantage would be felt by very few, compared to those who would gain nothing at all. The enemies of the church have taken great pains to prejudice the world against it, and the members of it, having only a life-interest therein, have not taken so much trouble to refute the calumnies as it is their general interest to do; you are, however, not to consider me as their defender, in what I have already said; but only as an advocate for a church establishment of some kind or other, in order to have sound morality preached among the people; and to
prove

prove a support to the crown, which not being permitted to keep up a standing army in time of peace, must have a very strong support from some means or other.

R. Then you consider the church as a very necessary support to royal authority.

A. I do ; but the influence of the clergy is not so great now as it was formerly. Before the art of printing, and the liberty of the press were introduced into society, the minds of the multitude were in the hands of the clergy ; thence we hear of prosecutions for sermons. Now the people are taught to read, and newspapers are circulated in every village, the understandings of the people are led by sophists and declaimers.—But what is the next abuse which you wish to remove ?

R. The grand one of all is the corruption of Parliament.

A. I have been long looking for this ; but as it will take up much time in the discussion, we will leave it till our next meeting.

FIFTH DIALOGUE.

WE will now resume our old subject of Reform, if it be agreeable to you; for I want to hear your sentiments upon the corruption of Parliament. All the abuses I have hitherto mentioned, you have either explained away, or proved that their importance or evil is of less magnitude than is generally supposed. I hope, however, you will not attempt to treat this grievance as you have treated others.

A. When I see an apparent evil, the first thing I consider is the remedy, whether possible or not; and the second thing I consider is, what inlet would there be opened to other evils, if this one were done away. There is an old saying, "of two evils, chuse the least." Do you assent to the wisdom of this precept?

R. If you have nothing but the choice of evils, then surely wisdom bids one take the least; but if I can turn one evil out, and shut the door against another, that seems to me to be the wisest of all.

A. You are quite right. Now your complaint is, that the majority of the House of Commons is corrupt, that many boroughs are at the disposal of the minister, that the representatives of others are bought over; and, in short, that the majority of the House are not guided by conscience, but by interest, in the votes which they give.

give. Is not that the substance of your complaint?

R. Nearly so.

A. I might say, that all this is clamour, and not possible to be proved; but I will not take that ground; I will for argument's sake allow, that a majority of the House of Commons will say *yes* or *no* to any question proposed, according as the minister may direct; I will in my admission go still farther, and allow it to be a great evil; and I wish it were possible to correct it, so as to make men vote according to their consciences, and to study the public interest more, and their own less; but, alas! the truth is, that every man makes self the center of all the combinations in this world. Moralists may blame this propensity in men; but it is impossible to be otherwise; whilst I feel all my own wants and wishes immediately, and those of others by reflection only, can it be doubted, which will have the greatest influence upon my conduct? think how strong are the motives to serve one's self, compared with the motives to serve another. We may lament or condemn the selfishness of our nature; but it never can be otherwise, unless the Great Creator thought fit to render another man's misery as distressing to my feelings, as my own miseries are; and also to make me partake of his joys, in as high a degree as he enjoys them himself. Now, as this cannot be the case, it is impossible for a man to be other than selfish. I can scarcely call to mind any author of eminence, (Lord Shaftesbury excepted) who has not allowed, that man is bad and full of vice; the only difference is, some authors look upon the vices of men as the effect of weakness; others, as the effect of madness; and others again, as the effect of a natural depravity:

depravity: Mandeville and Hobbes are of the last opinion, and I think with them; but whether the vices of man be the effect of weakness, madness, or depravity, their operation is the same. Now such being the nature of man, the first thing which he considers when he gets into power, is how he can gratify his own inclination; if he is a vain, or very ambitious man, he joins opposition for the sake of acquiring popularity and fame; if he is a covetous man, he joins ministry, in the hope of sharing in the loaves and fishes. His own dear self is the spring that moves the machine.

R. But do you think there are no instances of men voting according to their consciences, without being governed by any of these passions you have mentioned?

A. I should be sorry to think there was no instance; but the number of the impartial and just men, is so small, as to be unable to make head against the other parties. Now, if you agree with me that self is the center to which a man refers every thing in this world, let us see what would be the consequence of a minister's incapacity or unwillingness to obtain by indirect means a majority in the House of Commons.

R. Why the consequence would be, eternal opposition to all his measures.

A. And his loss of office; for it is agreed, that no man can be minister, except one that can govern, lead, or obtain the support of the Commons. If you had a House of Commons elected by the people at large, and the minister could not lead them, he must resign his employment, and the leader of the Commons must take his place; if this leader could not be brought over to the interest of the court, the first thing he would be likely to do, would be reducing the power

power of the crown; and this would probably end in the destruction of the monarchy, church, and every pillar of the present Constitution. No human being, as I said before, can foresee what would be the consequence of a House of Representatives elected by the people at large. That corruption is an evil I admit, find it where you will; but if the taking away of that evil, should open a door to anarchy and confusion, the remedy would be worse than the disease. Again, let me call your attention to the Constitution of this government: the king is not entrusted with a large standing army in time of peace; and why? because an ambitious king might turn that force against the liberties of the people; now at the same time that the king is not allowed to have a standing army to enforce obedience, you are against allowing him the means of procuring obedience by the gentler means of influence; still you require an executive power to be vigorous, to preserve the internal peace of the kingdom, and to defend us against our foreign enemies. You are worse than Pharaoh, who demanded bricks from the Israelites, and yet would allow them no straw towards making them; you want a watch to go without a spring, or a waggon without horses; for my own part, I look upon government as I do upon that large oak, that grows in yonder meadow; it covers a great deal of ground with its branches, and spoils a considerable share of grass; but it affords shade to the cattle in summer, and protects them from storms in winter; so it is with government, it takes from me a great part of my income, but it repays me with its protection from foreign and domestic enemies.

R. But

R. But some governments are conducted with less expence than others; and if you can have equal protection for one-fifth of your income, is not that better than paying one-half, or more, as you do at present?

A. Against this objection I have two things to urge; one is, that were there an independent House of Commons, elected by universal suffrage, I can have no security for my property at all; and the other is, if the bulk of my property were secure, I have no certainty that our then rulers would not help themselves as liberally from the public purse, or more so, than the present; we might pass from bad to worse; but I see no prospect of bettering our situations. But when you talk so much about a corrupted House of Commons, one would expect to see you come forward, and state some instances of their having betrayed their trust; of their having voted for measures that were favourable to the court, and injurious to the people, before I could think of making such an alteration in Parliament as the Reformers demand. I should like to have it made out clearly, that the present representatives are unequal to the duty expected from them. Now I cannot charge my memory with one instance of the House of Commons having done a thing for some years past, that was generally allowed to be wrong. In all great questions, if the House has been divided within doors, the people have been divided in opinion without doors; and when one part of the nation approves their conduct, and another part condemns, who can take upon himself to say positively, that they did wrong or right, since in such a case, wrong and right is mere matter of opinion?

R. Have you forgot the American War?

A. No; but at the commencement of that war the nation was extremely divided in opinion. The right of taxation was defended as well as denied; it was a matter of doubt whether it was expedient to enter into war or not, and when the people themselves are divided, let the House of Commons vote as they may, they cannot please all parties. When the war proved unsuccessful, the nation grew tired of the expense, and the consequent evils of it, somewhat sooner than the Ministry chose to put a stop to them. That tardiness seems to have been the cause of the present demand for a Reform; for when the Opposition found that the majority of the House could not be brought to discountenance the continuation of the war, they raised a cry against corruption, and put the people upon demanding a Reform in Parliament. This much, however, may be inferred from the History of the American War, that whenever the people of this country are nearly unanimous in their demands, it is not prudent, if possible, to refuse them. That petitions for or against any particular measure are often times slighted, is true, but it is only when it is known that a portion of the people petition, not through want, but sollicitation. We saw in the case of the expected Russian War, that the general disapprobation of the people was sufficient to overawe the Ministry, and to make them lay aside the idea of engaging in the contest, even though the majority in both Houses were in its favour. To the present war, I believe by far the majority of the people gave their hearty approbation, however weary they may be of it now that experience has convinced them of their error. I am not conscious of one instance, wherein the corruption of

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Parliament, supposing it to be a fact that they are as corrupt as the Reformers pretend, has been of any great prejudice to the nation at large, since the will of the people, when it becomes general, always is and always must be complied with. It is allowed by most writers of eminence, both ancient and modern, that a mixed form of government is the best and most durable, and it goes upon a very true supposition that all men are too fond of power to be trusted with too large a share; thence the necessity and the consequent introduction of check upon check, that is, King, Lords and Commons. Now, the point at issue between you and me is, whether the people have or have not as great a share and influence in the affairs of State as they could have consistently with their own welfare. The people's legal right to petition is never disputed, and if they can obtain whatever they ask for, with a tolerable degree of unanimity, what would you desire more? But you say, the people are not equally represented; the boroughs, many of them, are at the disposal of the minister, and he can carry any question he pleases, however detrimental to the public. Granting all that you say to be true, yet what does it prove more than this, that unanimity, or at least a majority of opinions, is necessary for the conducting of business? that that unanimity cannot be procured, such is the perverseness of human nature, without influence and patronage.

R. But you seem to be begging the question. Do you think that men never act conscientiously?

A. Some few perhaps do, but the number is too small to counterpoise the weight of those who act otherwise; but let me ask you, do you think

think that the eternal opposition (which it is the fashion of this country to make) to every ministerial measure, is the effect of sound judgment and good conscience?

R. No. I suppose the Opposition is made rather to the man than to the measure.

A. What reason have you then to hope, that a House of Commons elected by universal suffrage, and composed of God knows what characters, would not resist every measure that a minister might propose, for the sake of turning him out and supplying his place? Now, should that be the case, let us look forward to the consequence. Either there must be a perpetual change of ministers, or public business must be at a stand; for no minister, let his conduct be ever so good or his intentions ever so pure, would have a support sufficient to go on with his administration, if he had it not in his power to reward his supporters. Do you not perceive that opposition in this country is reduced to a system? you see two leaders pitted against each other, each has his phalanx, and probably most of the speakers have their parts assigned like a company of actors at Drury-lane. Now, if we had no perpetual or hereditary magistrate, with power sufficient to controul these wordy warriors, the contest would be decided, not by an appeal to the public judgment, but by the sword or bludgeon. If I am wrong in saying that opposition is reduced to a system, how can you account for the eternal difference of opinion that subsists in all political questions between the two great characters in this kingdom? Ask the opinion of these two men upon a point of the Roman or Grecian History, or even of the History of this Country, if the fact happened two hundred years back,

and there will be the most perfect harmony between them. But an opposition in this country is of vast use. It prevents a minister from doing many things which his love of power might induce him to do, were he not afraid of being exposed to the public indignation and resentment. By means of the speeches for and against every question of importance, (and these speeches published as they are, with great care and correctness, generally contain all that can be said on both sides of the question) the public are enabled to form a very just opinion of its merit or demerit. If the measure be in its own nature so bad as to alarm the minds of the people, a loud clamour is raised, and ministry are obliged to desist or repeal. This appears to me to be that exact share of democracy which is necessary to constitute a good government. It is with governments as with chemical mixtures; it is experience only that finds out the due proportion of each to constitute a good medicine: but you, and all those who clamour for a Reform in Parliament, are of opinion, that there can never be too much of democracy in a free government; but if you could be persuaded to abandon that wild idea of the people's being enlightened, and consequently more capable of governing themselves, and would consent to take experience for your guide, you would find that there does not exist one vice or folly in the most abominable despot, that has not been found to exist in as high a degree in popular assemblies. We have seen lately as much malice, pride, revenge, folly, blindness, injustice, cruelty, in a word, every thing that is bad, in a National Convention, as ever has been recorded in the history of the most execrable tyrant: but there is a danger of which you seem not to be

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aware,

aware. When the people are once set upon struggling for power, can you tell where they will stop? Can you quote me an instance in all your reading, which I know to be extensive, of a popular assembly that once began to struggle violently for power, that ever was content with a just and reasonable share?

R. Then the substance of your opinion is, that no reform ought to take place.

A. I should be unwilling to say *that* decidedly also; for if a small alteration could be made in order to quiet the minds of the people, and at the same time not to endanger the constitution by the introduction of novelties, I should have no objection; but to say where we should begin or where we should end, would require abilities, talents, knowledge, and judgment, far superior to what has fallen to my share. I would much rather go on as we are than give encouragement to any plan for reform that did not carry upon its face the most evident demonstration that it could do no mischief. Argument is so treacherous, and we so seldom in our reasoning take into our consideration all the little circumstances that may materially affect the conclusion, that I must confess my fears of being generally misled by ratiocination, particularly in matters concerning government, where an error may involve us in the most unhappy consequences.

R. Then I am to infer from the tenor of all your conversation, that you are not an anti-reformer, but an anti-revolutionist: so far I agree with you; and the only difference, were we to carry our argument farther, would be, what abuses could be reformed and corrected without endangering the constitution.

A. Even

A. Even so.

R. But I am not satisfied thoroughly with your opinion concerning right.

A. People do not always distinguish with exactness between *right* used as a substantive, and *right* used as an adjective. We say, it is right to do this and wrong to do that, and we mean nothing more than proper or improper, expedient or inexpedient: but when we use the word right, *jus*, as a substantive, we mean a well-founded, indefeasible claim. Now in a state of nature there can be no *right* or *jus*. It is the offspring of human laws. *Jus* should be founded upon *justitia*, and some theoretic writers say, that there can be no *jus* without it: that may be true in theory but not in practice with any nation in the universe. The law that gives to the first-born the whole of his father's property, if it consists in a freehold estate, and divides it equally among the brothers and sisters, if it consists in goods or money, may be founded upon feudal expediency, but was never founded upon justice: but as to the rights of the people, they are exactly what the constitution of their country gives them, more in some nations and less in others. If a society were broke up, the rights of the people would be every thing, because they would have power over every thing; but if a new society were about to be formed, strict justice would require equality in every thing. Expediency and the interest of every individual would forbid it. That every man should enjoy the fruits of his own labour is a principle of strict justice; but as some men would labour more than others, and be more fortunate in their endeavours, inequality of property must take place, and consequently an inequality

inequality of rights. If an angel from heaven were to act as arbiter in the settling of rights in a society, how would he act? He would give to all classes of people such shares as would best promote and secure the general happiness of the whole. Such are the rights upon which the people should insist, in beginning a government, if it were possible to find out with precision what those rights really were. It is this *desideratum* in politics that creates all the controversies among men. We do not know what the people should have and what they should not: now in this state of uncertainty, prudence bids us keep the ship as she goes, if she goes through the water without endangering her masts or her cargo. To apply all that I have said to the fulfilling of my promise made in the first day's conversation--I say, that it is to the interest of all classes of people in this kingdom to guard against dangerous innovation. I have shown that a Reform in Parliament carried to the length of universal suffrage, would be pregnant with dangers of the utmost magnitude, and that might lead to a total subversion of the constitution. Would a change of government be advantageous to the stockholder? Surely no; for his interest lies in supporting it. To the landholder? No: for he has to dread an Agrarian law. To the merchant? No; for he has to fear a confiscation of property. To the artist? No; for he will have no market for the works of genius. The same answer applies to the shop-keepers, tradesmen, artificers, and every class of men that get their bread by their industrious labour. To the very poor I say--You have parishes to apply to in cases of extreme distress; and whilst wealth and property reigns among

among the higher orders of society, you will never fail of benefiting by their charity and munificence. If the laws are overturned, your share in the scramble may be determined by the example of France, where the poor are put into a state of requisition, forced by dread of instant death into a service for which they were never qualified, and perish by thousands from all the calamities of foreign and civil wars. Few, very few, in a revolution are gainers in the end, compared to those who first lose every thing that is dear to them in this world, and then their own lives into the bargain. Believe me there is no man who casts up coolly and deliberately all the evils that are likely to befall him when his country is convulsed by internal agitations, and compares the magnitude of affliction he must endure if they should be realized, with the smallness of the pleasure and satisfaction he will or can enjoy from the most happy fortune, but must soon be convinced of the folly of lending his assistance to increase disturbance. You may, perhaps, think me the apologist of abuse, and if this came from a ministerial writer it would subject him to very unpleasant observations. It might be called an unparalleled piece of impudence to admit corruption and to defend it, and this I have been obliged in some measure to do in these conversations: but I have done it because I know that the nature of man in its present civilized and luxurious state is such as not to do without it: but my principal object is to shew that those who expect from a Reform in Parliament to have Halcyon days and a regenerated race of human beings, will find themselves woefully mistaken, and in all probability will pay dear, very dear, for the discovery

discovery of their error. The fact is, if you wish to have men as virtuous as they were formerly, they must all be as poor as they were formerly. Cincinnatus and Camillus lived in the days when Rome was very young and poor; and, perhaps, the offices they declined were much more troublesome than profitable. With due respect to the enlighteners of the present age, I must say, that they are but poor philosophers. They want to inspire two passions in the same breast that are directly opposite to each other, namely, love and contempt of money: to increase trade and commerce they praise the zeal and industry of the merchant, which is but another word for avarice; and to make men serve their country, they tell us that wealth is an abominable corrupting thing, and ought to be utterly despised. Again; these enlighteners of the public mind, though they know that experience is the touchstone of truth, never think of waiting to see what will be the fortune of the French republic after external peace is restored, but are for hurrying us with the *ça ira* tune into the same steps that led to the French Revolution. Common prudence would say, wait twenty or thirty years at least before you form an idea of what may be the result. Imitate the example of the farmers, who, if their landlord makes any attempt of improving the lands which he keeps in his own occupation, will wait two or three seasons with great patience and *sang froid*, to observe whether the return be suitable to the expense. This haste and precipitancy alone would be an argument sufficiently strong to prove that their ostensible object is not the true one.

R. I cannot answer for the purity of any man's intentions but my own. My wishes are all directed to the public happiness; and I would not lend my aid or assistance to any party of men that I suspected of having any thing but the good of the country at heart.

A. So far we coincide in opinion, and if any thing I have said on the subject of reform should be of sufficient weight to make you pause, and seriously think of the consequences, I have gained all that I intended. I do not expect you to be convinced; but I hope I have said enough to make you reflect; and I assure you also, that in all the arguments I have used in my conversation with you, and in all the arguments I use in my conversation with others, I have but one object in view, namely, that of peace and concord. I see much to blame in all parties, and I would to God it were in my power to reconcile all differences. If I were allowed to speak with freedom to all descriptions of men, I would say first to the minister—"Sir, you are, by station and office, the vice-father of the people: it is your province to apportion the burthens of state among them. Crush not, with increasing weight those whose burthens already squeeze them to the earth. When you set down to a sumptuous daily feast, remember that there are many of your fellow-creatures that want bread: it is in your power to deal out happiness and misery to your master's people. Shelter not yourself from blame under the shadow of the Parliament, for we know that taxation is your province, and in your hands." To the Lords I would say—"For your own sake, make light the weight of
" aristocracy

" aristocracy." To the Commons—" Look over
 " your statute books, expunge and repeal the
 " oppressive laws made by your predecessors:
 " repeal the game laws, and give not your ene-
 " mies an occasion to say that you cherish the
 " remains of Norman tyranny; correct the
 " abuses of Government, and devise means to
 " prevent their renovation; prove yourselves
 " not only the representatives, but the real and
 " sincere friends of the people at large, and the
 " guardians of the poor in particular." To the
 Clergy I would say—" Covet not pluralities; re-
 " side in your respective parishes; attend to the
 " morals of the people; win their affections by
 " charity and benevolence; consent to a fair com-
 " mutation of tythes; do not, by your avarice,
 " obstruct the increasing cultivation of the lands,
 " nor tax the labour of the industrious peasant;
 " prove, by your moderation, that you are the
 " true shepherds, and not the hirelings described
 " in the Scripture; recollect that the times are
 " critical, and demand your utmost vigilance to
 " watch over the morals of the people; coun-
 " teract the poison instilled into their minds by
 " applying that certain antidote, a faithful dis-
 " charge of your important duties; and demon-
 " strate to your enemies that you are not the lazy
 " drones of the hive, that rob the poor, indus-
 " trious bees of the largest portion of their ho-
 " ney." To the Lawyers I would say—" Make
 " smooth the path to justice: let not the number
 " and weight of unnecessary fees drive away the
 " injured suitor from your courts; let no man
 " have it in his power to say, that *Injury* op-
 " presses less than *Justice*." To the leaders of
 that society who stile themselves the Friends of
 the People I would say—" If you meant to act

“ up to the characters you profess, why lead
 “ the people into tumult and insurrection?
 “ why awaken them to wants which they never
 “ felt, and urge them to demand rights of
 “ which they do not know the meaning?” To
 the leaders I would say severally—“ You that
 “ have already created a large revenue in human
 “ folly, do not hope to raise a greater from hu-
 “ man madness!” To another—“ You that
 “ have fair expectations in the north, whose ta-
 “ lents, if not of the very first rate, are respect-
 “ able enough to hope for the first offices in this
 “ kingdom, what do you expect from sowing the
 “ seeds of discontent among the people? You
 “ have every thing to lose, and nothing to gain.
 “ If the juvenile ambition of leading a party be
 “ your aim, turn your eyes to France, and see
 “ the dreadful consequences of popular favour.
 “ See La Fayette, the pedagogue of French li-
 “ berty, driven from his country, and forced
 “ to seek an asylum in a Prussian prison, to
 “ save himself from the vengeance of his own
 “ disciples. Look at Dumourier, an exile, odi-
 “ ous to God and man, an outcast of society,
 “ that can scarcely find a place whereon to rest
 “ his head. Look at the fate of Petion, Ma-
 “ rat, and Robespierre, all raised by popular fa-
 “ vour to the highest pinnacle of glory, in or-
 “ der to make their fall the more tremendous.
 “ It is not the instability of the people’s disposi-
 “ tion that hurried these men to their graves;
 “ but the people in time discovered the fallacy of
 “ pretended friendship. An useful lesson to hy-
 “ pocrisy and dissimulation.” To another I
 would say—“ Your abilities are great; but great
 “ as they are, your success has been equal to
 “ them. You are at the head of your profes-
 “ sion,

“ sion, on which you confer more honour than
 “ you receive therefrom. Your heart I believe
 “ to be good, and your intentions to be pure;
 “ but it does sometimes happen with the best of
 “ men, that their zeal overwhelms their judg-
 “ ment. Remember that you owe your fortune
 “ to the laws of this country. Do not resemble
 “ the adder that stung the bosom which called it
 “ back to life.” To the people I would say—
 “ Be cautious in the selection of your friends :
 “ Remember how the people have been treated
 “ by their treacherous friends in a neighbouring
 “ country. What security can you demand, or
 “ what security can your friends give, that as soon
 “ as you have surrendered your rights into their
 “ hands, they will treat you with more lenity or
 “ justice than your cotemporaries have been
 “ treated? If you have grievances, make them
 “ known submissively to the king, and, as the
 “ common father of his people, he will rejoice
 “ in being your deliverer. And lastly, join
 “ with me in this short prayer—Give peace in
 “ our days, O Lord !”

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